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Christ the King
November 25, 2007

Luke 23:33-43

Remember Me

Intro: Our second New Testament Passage this morning is also from Luke. In the first reading we heard the prophecy concerning John the Baptist's role of announcing that God would come as promised, and that something new was beginning. John would prepare the way for Jesus. Now in Luke we read of Jesus' death upon a cross. Let us listen for God's word as it comes to us.

We end this church year today celebrating "Christ the King" Sunday. At first, it seems rather strange to finish the church year and look forward to advent with these two passages from Luke, but they both serve to proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus, as the Christ, God's anointed one. Together they are in a way like bookends of the beginning and ending of Jesus' earthly life. The first text offers a blessing on John the Baptist, who would make a way for Jesus, the promised Savior, a conquering king who would defeat all enemies. And the second one describes Jesus' death and departure from this life, as he is taunted about being "King of the Jews".

Within each of these passages we find Jesus described in royal terms. What stands out most as we look at the beginning and the end of Jesus' life, is that in his crib and on the cross Jesus is acknowledged as King by those who would be seen as outsiders. Those who traveled to see the new born king in Bethlehem were strangers, John the Baptist with his eating and dressing habits, was most certainly not in the inner circles of Jewish society. And at the time of his death, when Jesus bore a sign above his head that read; "King of the Jews" it was a criminal who saw him to be truly that. On this day of bringing to mind the reign of Christ, we are reminded of how strikingly different the

"kingdom of God" is from any other place we may know.

The title King of the Jews is one Jesus never claimed for himself. When asked by Pilate "are you King of the Jews"? , he said "Those are your words. My kingdom is not of this world." And that drove Pilate and others around him crazy, "what do you mean, a Kingdom that is not of this world?" The followers of Jesus did not understand either. They surely felt they were betrayed as they watched their leader being crucified. This was not the fate of the Most High, the one who would save us, and give light, and guide us to the ways of peace. A shameful death on a cross, this is not how it would end for the promised King. The disciples did not comprehend what was happening at that moment. Jesus' family did not understand, nor the guards. At the time of his death many followers had drifted away from, or deserted Jesus.

There are still plenty of people witnessing the execution, mostly mocking Jesus, saying "you offered salvation to others, now save yourself." The crowd does this, the guards do, and even one of the others being crucified cries out "save yourself and us!" They still see kings as only warriors or conquerors. The other condemned one does not. He sees things differently. He sees that Jesus will not enter his realm by

coming down off the cross but by dying on it. The insults, the floggings, even death, was part of the prophetic plan that leads to resurrection. He understood, and so he says "Jesus, remember me."

He could see and understand what the others could not comprehend. The disciples could not understand how or why their Messiah could be rejected and executed. This person, this criminal, says he was rightly being executed for things he had done, but that Jesus was innocent. He understands it was precisely because Jesus was on the Cross that he is the Messiah.. He offers a confession of faith and a sign that he understands the mystery of the gospel when He says "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your Kingdom."

When it is asked as a question "Remember Me?" can mean a lot of different things. At a high school reunion it can be an embarrassing taunt "remember me?" When the phone rings and someone asks "remember me" it can be a old friend or long lost cousin who wants to sleep on your floor. When "remember me" is a question it sends us flipping through our mental rolodexes trying to find the connection to this person. And if you remember someone it says a great deal. The history you shared created an impression, the events together got filed away somewhere where they could be found again. When

we remember someone it brings the past into the present and say that what happened matters.

But “remember me” does not always come as a question. At times it is a heart-filled personal plea from someone. When it comes time to say goodbye to someone because it is time to move to a new town or move to a new relationship, we often say “remember me”. As Christians, it is one of those deep down core desires to be known, recognized by God, especially in our times of need. We long to be claimed by God and called by name. Remember me, even though you are saving the world, don’t overlook or forget me.

Seeing the invisible is a difficult thing. Jesus came as a tangible and visible expression of God. Many saw it, and believed it, if only for a moment, some missed it. At best we only get glimpses of God and the reign or kingdom of Christ. The one who hung beside Jesus had that glimpse. The passage calls us to consider a question; is there something about being in harsh, difficult circumstances that allows our eyes and hearts to be open enough to see something of the ways of God? Is it through tears that we can best see the reality of God’s promise and presence? If so, are we able to give thanks not only for the blessings in our lives, but also for those painful points when things are not

as we’d choose, and yet we see God’s gracious presence with us.

In what must have been a most powerful moment, Jesus lifts his head to respond the dying thief. While the request is an open ended plea "Remember me", Jesus’ response is most specific "Today, you will be with me in Paradise". Jesus words are not only an offer of forgiveness, but an offer of friendship. Jesus leaves this life saying to the most unlikely person "you will be with me". That is good news we can all be thankful for. That as we look through the most difficult times of our lives, no matter how far we feel we have been from God, we may yet see the presence of God and hear the loving words of inclusion, "You will be with me".

Next Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent – a time of preparation and waiting for the Christ to come with hope and salvation. A time when we celebrate that God is with us. We can so easily get wrapped up in the sweetness of the infant Jesus, in the glitter of the secular season... but even if there are no posted warnings as we enter the shopping malls, we must not forget where obedience led God’s Shepherd.

We can laud and praise him as King, we can ask him, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.” But the question remains for us – can we

follow him, knowing where he will lead? As we are remembered by our Lord, will we remember him, and follow him, with offering the gift of our lives?

Amen.